

Sermon Lent V Year B 2018  
Jeremiah 31:31-34  
Psalm 51:5-10 (1-13)  
Hebrews 5:5-10  
John 12:20-33  
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In our Lenten journey, this fifth Sunday is pivotal leading us to next week's Palm Sunday. Our gospel lesson is pivotal as well. Jesus had caused the hopes of many to soar in his day, even some Greek speakers.

These Greek people had come to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. We do not know much about them. Perhaps they were Greeks who had embraced Judaism. Yet, beyond the festival of Passover, they had come with a desire to see the person who was the talk of the countryside. They wanted to see the miracle worker, Jesus of Nazareth.

This turning point shows that Jesus' ministry is to move beyond the covenantal relationship with Israel. To this point Jesus' ministry had been directed and limited to the Hebrew people. But these folks represent a new direction of mission. The Greeks weren't just coming for themselves. They came for all of us as well. All of us who long to "see Jesus." Scripture uses the phrase "to see" not as a visual expression but meaning "to know." So to see Jesus is to "know Jesus."

The request of these Greek people seemed to bring about a change in Jesus' outlook. Previously, we have been told repeatedly in John's gospel that Jesus' hour had not yet come. But with this passage everything changed. Now Jesus says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

This is the acceptable hour. Now the time has come at last. Jesus' ministry, as the disciples had experienced it, was coming to an end. The three years of preparation, of journeying together, of telling the stories and sharing the parables was coming to a close. No more healing the sick, or casting out demons, no more demonstrations of God's power and love with the miraculous feedings. As meaningful as the time together had been, it must now come to an end. Perhaps at this point, the disciples' hopes and vision had been ingrained in their hearts as the prophet Jeremiah had foretold. Perhaps the movement was finally ready to be launched.

But despite all that had been done thus far, it would not be good news without what lay ahead. Jesus must become vulnerable to the forces of evil, if Jesus is to win the victory over death and the grave, he must lay down his life. Our Easter joy comes at great cost.

The death of the seed to bring new life is no small thing. It is a metaphor for all of life. This is true of so much of our own development isn't it? We know that if we want to take on something new, we frequently have to let go of something else. We cannot attend two meetings at the same time. We cannot be in two places at once, though that hasn't stopped us from trying. New opportunities, new seeds of potential always come at a cost.

Parents too experience this letting go over the course of their children's growth and development. As our children grow into the persons that God is calling them to become, we must let go of some of the dreams we have been harboring. Our secret hopes that they will blossom and succeed in certain ways or directions. Parents must embrace the development and independence of their children.

Emotional intelligence brings with it a sense that out of each of the little deaths of life comes new potential, new life. Much depends of course on your outlook. Life is after all a series of giving up and taking on. We can choose to focus on the giving up. The dying to our old selves and old ways, or we can focus instead on new possibilities, new opportunities that open up with each transition, each new stage of life. It all depends on how we see our lives. As they say, perspective is everything.

For any seed to grow into its full potential, that seed must be sown in the soil of potential and possibility. There in that rich, fertile environment, the seed dies, but new life emerges. This is the time of year that Lynchburg Grows is humming with activity. New mulch is being added to beds, seeds planted, seedlings begun in basements are being transplanted. All this is prologue to the miracle that the new season heralds.

Jesus this morning turns the biblical narrative and our attention to the future. His hour has come and so he points us ahead to Holy Week and the cross. Jesus in the gospel of John knows where he is going and goes willingly. He goes out of faith, obedience, and trust. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.”

Jesus’ death and resurrection leads to the birth of the Church. The good news of Jesus’ saving work spreads and continues to spread. Not just to the Hebrew people, the chosen people of God, but to Greeks and to all people. But that would not have been possible if Jesus’ hour had not come, if Jesus had not laid down his life for the life of the world.

The good news of God’s love and connection though is a story that predates Jesus. In our OT lesson, we heard the prophecy of Jeremiah. As

Jeremiah foretold, all shall know the Lord. Jeremiah promises a new covenant written on our hearts. “For they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord.”

Deep within us at our very core we know God. We too know the Lord from the least of us to the greatest. When people say they are spiritual but not religious, they are alluding to this divine connection. Sure, this knowledge has been aided and abetted by our families of origin, by learning in Sunday school, Sunday forums, our reading, our prayer, and even a few sermons perhaps. But underlying all of that is an intuitive knowledge of God, a deep knowing. A deep knowing that is always drawing us closer to God’s self. St. Augustine wrote, “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and **our heart is restless** until it finds its rest in thee” (St. Augustine from *Confessions*).

That deep knowing, that covenant connection is present in all of us. It is a connection with our conscience. Our sense of right and wrong. The still small voice of reason, concern and control. Somehow the divine initiative is intimately connected with us. The covenant is not just written on our hearts but in our minds as well.

Paul’s prayer in the Letter to the Ephesians is one that I write in cards to our students at graduation because I believe that Paul’s hope is also God’s hope for all of us. Paul says, “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know the hope to which God calls you...”

This insight into the presence and workings of God in our lives is a gift, yet it is a gift that must be developed. The choice is ours. How will we respond

to God? Lent offers us an opportunity to reflect on our relationship with the one who is always drawing us closer.

I hope that something of your Lenten journey, of turning your life closer to God, whether through reflection, prayer, fasting, worship or service, you have developed a deeper sense of your connection to the divine love that surrounds you at all times. Of God's great hope for you. Lent is a season to repent and turn around, and open ourselves to the divine mystery. To begin to see with the eyes of our hearts enlightened.

And knowing something of God's hope for us allows us to risk... to venture forth... to reach out and connect. As we grow in faith, we may just realize that our hour has come as well. This knowing God in our hearts means that at some point we may appreciate that our hour has come. This is our time to act. It happened for Jesus and it happens for us.

What might that look like?

God is always at work in our lives, drawing us forward. Perhaps our time may mean that we are to share our faith with others. This may be our time to make Jesus known to others. By extending an invitation to someone that you feel might benefit from connecting with St. John's. You might even use one of our Easter invitation cards.

This past Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. students around the country felt their hour had come as they walked out of class to observe 17 minutes of silence to call our attention to the horror of gun violence. They were unwilling to stay quiet as precious little is done to limit the availability of semi-automatic and automatic weapons and large capacity ammunition magazines. Unwilling to stay silent when adults refuse to act.

Or perhaps you are feeling called to take a stand against some form of abuse in your life. Many women and some men have joined the #metoo movement in finding their voices to tell their stories concerning what happened to them as a result of those abusing their power.

Faith calls us to act. Lent and other intentional times of spiritual reflection can lead us to action. This might be a call to respond to the needs of those struggling to learn in our schools, or to join in feeding the hungry, or offering opportunity to someone seeking employment. Some of these actions are acts of evangelism, some are political action, and some are social action, but they are all called forth out of our faith in Jesus. That is the life of faith that Jesus modeled for us. And the life to which Jesus is always calling us. Lenten journeys sometimes have this kind of impact on us. If so, the road ahead won't be easy, but Jesus has promised to be with us always. And that we can depend on.